

**EMPIRE STATE COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Interview with William R. Dodge—26 February 1991**  
**By Richard Bonnabeau**

(reformatted with preamble and includes Dodge's minor revisions of 6/2013)

*Dr. William R. Dodge was a member of the task force of top SUNY administrators gathered by Chancellor Ernest L. Boyer to plan Empire State College. At the time, Dodge was SUNY's Acting University Dean for Continuing Education. Dodge's independent study program, which enrolled as many as 6,000 students at its peak, demonstrated the need and demand for a nontraditional college that would provide students a pathway to earn college degrees. His initial appointment at ESC was Dean of Administrative Services. In that capacity, Dodge played a critical role along with President James W. Hall, Arthur Chickering, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Loren Baritz, Provost for Learning Resources and subsequently Executive Vice President, to bring A Prospectus for a New University College to fruition. In the very first year of the founding of Empire State College Dodge was the Dean of Deans.*

*In the waning months of 1972, Dodge--recognizing that the establishment of regional learning centers in major urban centers in the state had neglected less populated areas---launched the Center for Statewide Programs. Statewide consisted of small learning units (satellites) staffed by one or two full-time mentors, stretching across New York. Dodge administered the center from his headquarters in Saratoga Springs.*

*Of note, was Dodge's support for establishing units to serve special groups of students in Metropolitan New York. This effort spawned highly successful programs, including Arts and the City, Religion and the City, and Communications and the City. These units gave mentors and their students access to New York's remarkable cultural resources. The Statewide learning units provided the precedent, along with the ESC London Program established in December of 1971 by Kenneth T. Abrams for other centers to create satellite programs of their own.*

*In 1975, Dodge provided a home for a new initiative, Extended Programs, which was designed to serve students who chose—for either a learning preference or a host of other reasons, including residence overseas—structured pathways to pursue their degrees. Students completed their work through a variety of resources and modes of study such as popular ESC learning modules, nationally acclaimed telecourses such as Carl Sagan's Cosmos, group studies, and structured as well as individualized learning contracts for distance learning. In 1978, Extended Programs was merged with the ESC Independent Study Program, a non-degree granting division of the College, offering SUNY and ESC students directed independent study courses, among them specially adapted British Open University courses to accumulate credits toward earning degrees through their SUNY campuses or ESC centers. A year later, the name of the new entity was changed to the Center for Distance Learning in recognition of the Center's close association with the BOU.*

*In 1979, Dodge accepted a position as executive dean and special assistant to the president at World University (Universidad Mundial), a private institution with headquarters in*

*San Juan, Puerto Rico. World University had plans to develop sister institutions similar to ESC throughout the Western Hemisphere. Initial programs were established in Miami, Washington, D.C., and Phoenix. Dodge, after a few years with World University resigned, having concluded that the chronic absence of sound management practices, compounded by the failure to appoint a board of trustees, and reckless spending by the president could not be corrected. Shortly before World University declared bankruptcy in 1982, Dodge was hired by F. Thomas Clark, president of Rockland County Community College, to serve as dean of instruction. Clark was the former dean of the Albany Center and the director of ESC's Center for Individualized Education. Six years later, Dodge retired from Rockland as Vice President for Academic Affairs.*

**RB:** At the time that Empire State College was founded, or being planned, what responsibilities did you have at SUNY?

**WD:** I was in the central administration and my primary responsibility at that time was to develop independent study programs, primarily for adult students through two- and four-year campuses of the university. The central administration did not operate the programs, the campuses did. What we did was develop the materials.

**RB:** Did you have any relationship with SUNY of the Air?

**WD:** We worked very closely with them. We worked with them in identifying program needs and identifying faculty and other resources that they used in the production of TV courses that were broadcast over the University network.

**RB:** I understand that the SUNY of the Air project or program was running into trouble about the time Empire State College was planned and launched. Can you discuss that?

**WD:** Yes, the University of the Air was really developed under Chancellor Gould, who, prior to becoming chancellor of the University, was president of Channel 13, New York [a public television station]. He had quite a commitment to educational television. In the 1960s, during the Rockefeller Administration, there were ample resources allocated to the University [SUNY]. Governor Rockefeller made sure of that. He wanted to build a great university in the State of New York. New York was the last state in the union to create a state university. He hired Sam Gould because of his reputation, first as president of Antioch College in Ohio and then as president of Channel 13. He was an educational innovator. Sam established the central Office for Continuing Education and the University of the Air. He created an Office of Planning for the University, and he did a lot of things that he felt were necessary to move the University forward.

Well, the University of the Air consumed a lot of resources. One course, and this is in terms of 1960s dollars, cost about \$100,000 to produce. What was in the can, so to speak, from Harvard and from the Chicago City Colleges and other institutions that had been doing instructional television for a while was pretty much the talking-head approach to television teaching. That is,

the professor stood in front of a drape with a camera on him and lectured. Sam, because of his background at Channel 13, wanted to do more of a production of these courses, hence the higher cost. The stuff that was available wasn't really suitable. It really didn't hold an audience's attention, and so the University of the Air set about producing its own programs. Well, they built up quite a staff. They had studio facilities. The University of Albany was given a magnificent studio at that time because it was handy to the central administration, and they began to produce some courses using outstanding faculty throughout the university. But they couldn't get good air time. The University network consisted of the educational TV stations around the state at that time. They gave the University of the Air broadcast time that was negotiated between the University and the [public television] station managers. So, you had University of the Air programs on at six o'clock in the morning or opposite the game of the week on Saturday afternoon. It did not attract an audience. In its final year, the University of the Air had two FTEs enrolled—literally—and it was spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on air time. Anyway, with the cost of production, with the significant staff the University of the Air had, and with FTEs, it was decided, when the budget crunch came in the early '70s, to pull the plug on that operation.

**RB:** How would you compare your program [producing independent study courses] in terms of reaching adult students, non-traditional learners, to SUNY of the Air? What kind of an impact were you having across the State?

**WD:** We used the University of the Air courses as part of our effort. In part, it was a joint enterprise, but the Office of Continuing Education developed mostly print material supplemented by audio tapes, other kinds of media. We believed that if we could package quality instructional materials and offer them through various campuses, using good faculty members, and make these materials portable so students wouldn't have to be at the television set at six o'clock in the morning or when the game of the week was playing—if they could use these materials wherever they were and whenever they wished, they would be effective. And through the various campuses, once we set up the program, the total enrollment quickly reached about 6,000 students. To hasten program development, we bought correspondence courses from places like the University of Wisconsin, the University of California at Berkeley, which had a very large correspondence program, and we supplemented those with our courses. When we did our study guides, we tried to put in illustrations, and we tried to identify other collateral readings and resources for the student.

**RB:** What kind of students were you reaching with this program?

**WD:** Mostly working adults. I would say about 99 percent were working adults.

**RB:** That was really significant. You had about 6,000 enrollments a year and you were reaching working adults. Am I correct in thinking that you had demonstrated that there was a significant market for the non-traditional adult student?

**WD:** Well, nobody ever said no, but I think that the success of that program and the response to it probably figured in, at least in part, in the establishment of Empire State College.

**RB:** Yes, I think you're right. Now, Bill, how did you become involved with the planning of Empire State College? Did you have a formal or informal role in that planning?

**WD:** I had a fairly formal role. I was asked to be part of the planning committee right from the outset because of what I'd been doing in the Office for Continuing Education. I believe that I was the only one on the University committee who had the practical experience of creating materials and working with the adult student. Art Chickering was brought in very early on as a consultant because of his publications on the adult learner and his work at Goddard and with other non-traditional universities. He had really more experience than I did in organizing a non-traditional college, and he had done considerable theoretical research on adult learners and what makes them tick and what works with them. Initially, there were about five of us. There was Chickering, myself, Jim Hall, and there was somebody out of Ernie Boyer's office, he was a vice chancellor at the time.

**RB:** Merton Ertell [Boyer's deputy vice chancellor]?

**WD:** Yes, Ertell was there. However, his schedule precluded him from being at a lot of meetings. He was looking out for Boyer's interests but many times he had an assistant substitute for him.

**RB:** When did you join this planning group?

**WD:** If my memory serves me correctly, the [grant] money—the million dollars [from Ford and Carnegie] was obtained during the summer, late summer. The planning committee was created in October of '70. We were planning through about December. We had gone as far as we could in our minds anyway, and the only way to flesh out the plan was to do a pilot, get an experimental program going. We asked Ford and Carnegie, which had given the University money for planning, if we could use the balance of it for operations, and they said yes. So, in the Spring of '71, we began to hire faculty, find facilities, and we took our first students in the Fall of that year.

**RB:** In regard to your role in the planning, what were the major points that your planning covered?

**WD:** For the draft for the college?

**RB:** Yes.

**WD:** Well, there were a number of things. We were told to plan a college without regard to traditional academic concern. If we were to wipe academic history away, what would we plan? So in our discussions we decided that the academic year based on an agrarian society didn't make any sense. Students ought to be able to enroll at any time, drop out and come back and graduate at any time. That was the first thing. Secondly, we decided that numerical grades or letter grades really didn't inform anybody of what the student learned. So, we decided to look at that very hard and come up with an alternative form of evaluation. Thirdly, we didn't think there was much rhyme or reason to the credit system--three credit hours for this and two

credits hour for that, etc. The fact that you could artificially divide American history, for instance, into 30 or 40 year segments to accommodate the credit value didn't make sense. So, we decided that we would abandon the credit measure for student progress.

**RB:** So you went to months of credit [one semester hour per week of full-time study]?

**WD:** No, we weren't thinking in terms of months at that point. What we were thinking of was what the student learned. You know a set of objectives. What should a college graduate know? It's the kind of thing we always talk about in higher education and then go back to general education requirements. We didn't get around to months until we started the operation. You see an academic unit was one of the problems that we couldn't anticipate, and I'll get to that a little later. The other thing that we decided was that instruction didn't have to be in the classroom for many kinds of instruction, most kinds. The classroom, in some cases, probably was the worst place to learn. So we decided that the College should be a college without walls, not just an experimental college on a campus someplace that would quickly recover all the trappings we were trying to shed. And those were the primary bases for creating a new college. Obviously, we wanted to make it attractive to the working adult, the older student, but we didn't want to cut out the traditional college-age student at that time. We wanted to create an institution that would attract people of all ages. Now remember, we just came out of the '60s where the buzz word was relevance. The elective system was in vogue, and I think in some ways that thinking was still leading us to believe at that point that this kind of an institution would attract those students who wanted to have a "relevant" curriculum. And starting from these premises, we then developed the proposed college with contract learning, with written evaluations, with open enrollment that, you know, rolling enrollments at any time, any day of the week. We didn't anticipate at that time the need for orientation sessions and the kinds of things that evolved later. The other final element, incidentally, was the evaluation of learning already acquired whether it was in or outside the classroom. In other words, learning acquired from life experience.

**RB:** And that was part of the planning?

**WD:** Oh, yes, absolutely.

**RB:** Why did that come into the picture?

**WD:** Well, first of all, if students can learn informally under the aegis of a university outside of the classroom, then they could learn informally without the university outside of the classroom. And many experiences result in college-level learning that should be recognized without forcing the student to go back into the kind of lock-step learning environment of the college or university.

**RB:** Now who among your group [Boyer's task force] sponsored the idea?

**WD:** Art Chickering, I think, was the impetus for recognizing informal learning. It had been done before. The University of Oklahoma had offered an adult degree program and made

something of evaluating informal learning. Again, Antioch College in Ohio had a work-study program since the '30s, where their students went out and worked in various environments and it was part of the college curriculum. Now you can say, "Well, that's contract learning." On the other hand, whether it was contract learning or whether it was an internship, an externship or anything else, what you are doing when you engage in that kind of program is tacitly acknowledging that people learn outside of the classroom in an informal structure. So there was plenty of precedent for us.

**RB:** Of course, CLEP was established at that point, wasn't it?

**WD:** Yes, CLEP was established but it was very limited. It was nothing on the scale it is now and the Regents External Degree program was not in existence. But that was all by examination, not by assessment, and there's a difference between examining for what people know and assessing what people know.

**RB:** That being?

**WD:** The portfolio, the interview, the demonstration of learning skills and so forth. That is assessment. Paper tests like CLEP are examinations.

**RB:** Sort of like a shot in the dark.

**WD:** Yes.

**RB:** There is no guarantee that the instrument will hit the target. Because learning varies so much, with individualized assessment you're assured of assessing what it is the student has learned.

**WD:** Yes, and you're pretty much running the gamut of whether it's a narrow or a wide range of learning acquired – or no learning at all.

**RB:** Who recruited you to work with the planning group?

**WD:** I don't know. I got a command from on high to join the group.

**RB:** That was directly from Boyer?

**WD:** Yes. Mert Ertell called me and said that there were people involved with this who thought that I could make a contribution to it. I wasn't the first one named, obviously. About the second or third meeting I was into it. I came on board in October, and we had the final report ready and submitted by February.

**RB:** Given your interest in independent study materials, packaged materials, did you push for that being part of the spectrum of learning?

**WD:** No, not really. I thought they might be useful as supplemental materials to a contract but not as the main vehicle because, though we had 6,000 enrolled at its peak, the completion rate

was lousy. And nationwide, the completion rate with correspondence courses was less than 25%. So, while people enrolled in droves, there was little follow-through.

**RB:** That means instructional follow-through?

**WD:** The people who enrolled did not pursue their studies and, in large part, the faculty at that time did not encourage them or did not follow through with them because a student out of sight was out of mind. Faculty members were teaching full loads and were being paid per student on an overload basis to do this. In many cases, they really didn't care, basically, whether the students completed the lessons or not. They had the tuition money, and if the student didn't complete within a year, which was the time limit, so be it. Because of the completion rate and because of the lack of follow through on the part of the faculty, I was not really interested in pushing more for correspondence courses. I liked the contract idea and believed that the materials could be part of a contract, but the difference was having a full-time faculty member who was committed to a limited number of students.

**RB:** Why do you think the SUNY campuses bought into the independent student program with the completion rates were so low? How did they benefit.

**WD:** The income rate wasn't that low.

**RB:** Did it help their FTE [Full-Time-Enrollment] rate?

**WD:** Yes, sure. And it was something at that time that Sam Gould was pushing. Anything the Chancellor wanted usually would be supported financially for the most part. Sam Gould was an innovator and some of the campuses had not yet been drawn kicking and screaming into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was a rather harmless way, with minimum campus disturbance, to demonstrate a form of innovative education.

**RB:** From what I understand, your notion of the learning contract was broader than Chickering's. Chickering focused on individualized learning while you viewed the contract as a vehicle that would reflect different approaches to independent study. It could be independent study materials, coursework, or what have you. Is this correct?

**WD:** No, not at all. We were both supportive of the individualized approach. We both recognized that the contract had to be something more than reading a few books, writing a paper, and meeting with a professor a few times. I know we both agreed that any kind of instructional material that was organized and appropriate both in complexity and level of learning should be grist for the mill of a contract. All I'm saying is that these SUNY independent study courses were a resource for mentors. We didn't know what a contract was going to look like at this point. We hadn't thought-out the form of the contract. We hadn't thought-out the responsibilities of the mentor. All we knew was that there were a lot of learning materials in libraries, in colleges, in universities, at work, in cultural organizations, and in government—a lot of learning materials that could be drawn on, but we had no idea how to go about organizing them at the point.

**RB:** So, you saw the contract as a vehicle.

**WD:** Yes. It was an organizing structure for marshaling these resources within the community--academic and social, governmental and cultural.

**RB:** When did you make the transition job-wise from SUNY central to Empire State College?

**WD:** Well, when permission was received to become operational, Chickering and Jim Hall and I were pretty much delegated to get the thing organized and up and running. We were told to find some kind of facility, to begin to hire faculty members, and to bring in students as quickly as was possible. Jim had limited administrative experience at the campus at that time, and Chick came from outside the University and didn't know the state structure and budgeting. I'm not sure he was all that interested in those things. He was, and is, an academic person. Because I had responsibility for budgets, had worked with facilities at various campuses within the University, I was assigned the administrative role—dean of administration or whatever. None of us had any titles. It was a kind of troika. We were pulling together, and nobody had been appointed anything in those very early days. We did decide that whatever facility we located would not be in Albany. About that time Skidmore had moved to its new campus, or as in the process of moving to its new campus, and they were interested in either renting or selling the old campus they had in Saratoga. That's where we began to look for facilities.

**RB:** Now, why did you want to move out of Albany?

**WD:** We didn't want to be that close to the central administration. The decision was made between the three of us that it might be better to put at least a little geography between us and the central administration. We didn't want Empire State College to be seen as an arm of the central administration, and we didn't want the meddling that kind of proximity might encourage.

**RB:** What did your administrative responsibilities include?

**WD:** Well, initially, it was budget, facilities, and hiring faculty.

**RB:** When did that occur, the hiring process--in the summer of '71?

**WD:** No, actually, we started right away, about March or April. We brought some people with us, administrative people from the central administration. We brought, for instance, Terry Weigert who was in the business office, and we brought some support staff, a couple of secretaries. Judy Dober was one of the first people we hired. We advertised for faculty and were having people recommended to us by colleagues. This was before a lot of affirmative action regulations were in place. So it wasn't a requirement to advertise nationwide at that point. We were looking for a particular type of person. What we got initially, in many instances, were flower children some of whom we hired to our regret. We got a few wackos, too. So, yes, we started early on. We got some people that other campuses really wanted to get rid of. But we also hired many very good people. But as I say, we got some duds that we had to thin out shortly after hiring them.

**RB:** Were you able to explain the mission of the college to those people at that time?

**WD:** Yes and no. What we weren't able to explain was what a learning contract was. We worked that out in internal workshops where everybody participated. At the time, we were hiring faculty, we were doing soul-searching workshops in Saratoga and we were looking for a learning center facility in Albany. Saratoga was a little too isolated to be the site of the first learning center. We did the orientation in Saratoga for the first new students, but we opened the center in the basement in one of the buildings of the old campus at the State University in Albany. We opened up with about six or seven faculty members. We did a new student orientation. There was no Center dean.

Jim Hall was, shortly after we moved to Saratoga, named director of the College by Ernie Boyer. Chick was a little upset with that and went down and talked with Boyer. Boyer said it was kind of temporary thing and that he would name the president later. Well, he did name the president and it didn't happen to be Chickering. Anyway . . . back to the [Albany] Learning Center. We had not a dean at the time. We hired a faculty member out of the University of Albany [SUNY Albany] who was teaching science. We gave him the impossible title of acting director of the learning center. He was on leave from Albany because he didn't think this thing was going to fly, and I don't think he really believed in the concept. Students were enrolled and faculty began writing learning contracts, albeit rather weak contracts—because everybody was new at this thing.

The big hook was how you assess prior learning. All these people who enrolled were there on the assumption that they were a matter of weeks away from their degree. They also believed everything they did in their lifetime was worth credit. Anything was fair game: raising a kid, going to New York City, painting praying hands on black velvet. We had discussed the learning contract but we hadn't had time to really tackle assessment. Well, some of the faculty believed that each faculty member should be able to talk with the student and then grant credit on the spot. Others wanted it to be a committee effort and included a portfolio rather than leave it to an individual faculty member. In any event, there was no process in place. So, the students got frustrated. They were now well into their third and fourth week and they were submitting these hopelessly inadequate essays. They were getting unhappy and putting pressure on the faculty members.

The faculty members got after the acting director who elected to go back to SUNY Albany. Chick went down as acting dean, or director, and tried to split the responsibilities in Saratoga with running the center in Albany. Well, he couldn't spend the amount of time necessary in Albany to do that and people were screaming at him. So, finally, I was asked to do it. I went down to Albany as acting director for about three days a week. The first two weeks, whenever we met, the faculty sat there and yelled at me, literally. The big complaint against Saratoga was not telling them how to do assessments. I said, "Well why don't we do it and tell Saratoga what we're doing. So we did set up a committee and established guidelines for the portfolio. They were rudimentary guidelines that the committee used to assess the students. It was almost like a doctoral examination. We would make judgments as to how much credit a student should

have for advanced standing. The problem with that was the students were submitting portfolios without competent evaluation. In other words, the portfolio segments were not substantiated by anyone competent in the field. It was just a portfolio outlining the experience and what the students said they learned. The faculty members on the committee would question the students and make a decision as to whether or not they'd learned anything and then--right then and there--either give the credit or not give the credit. In many cases, the committees were awarding credit in areas where none of the members of the committee had any competence whatsoever.

**RB:** And you had no central office for assessment?

**WD:** That came much later. At any rate, that was the process at that time—obviously unsatisfactory. But at least it did go to a committee. The refinements, such as expert evaluation of student learning, more effective documentation of when and where and what the experience was that resulted in the learning, all of those things, came over a period of time.

**RB:** Do you know when OPRA [Office of Program Review and Assessment] got started? Was that in '72?

**WD:** Later than that.

**RB:** So, really it was kind of fly by the seat of your pants for a while.

**WD:** Oh, yes, in terms of both contracts and evaluation of prior learning.

**RB:** What kind of academic review was provided for? Did the center in Albany have an associate dean who reviewed the learning contracts and assessment portfolios?

**WD:** Every center had an associate dean and an assistant dean. The assistant dean was initially to identify the community resources that could be used by students and mentors in their contracts. The associate dean was kind of the academic officer of the center who reviewed the contracts and assured both quality and quantity for the credit. But after two or three years, the role of the assistant dean disappeared and the associate dean became sort of a Checkpoint Charlie for both portfolios and contracts. But as the workload increased, in terms of the numbers of the students, we hired assessment officers in each of the centers. That was shortly after the Office of Assessment was established in Saratoga and Al Serling was brought in [from the Educational Testing Service] to set up some standards and a process for reviewing the portfolios centrally. Initially, these committees at the various centers would award credit and then the portfolio and the award would be checked in the central administration of the college; and, you know, the awards were based on very, very flimsy evidence, if there were any evidence at all. So, it was quickly recognized that that process had to be tightened.

**RB:** When you were planning the college, you must have planned some kind of process for assessment, some kind of way of giving students credit for experiential learning.

**WD:** When we were planning the college?

**RB:** Yes, when you were planning the College.

**WD:** No, we didn't. That was the problem.

**RB:** So, you started without that?

**WD:** Yes, the only definite things we had were advanced placement tests or CLEP exams, which were things we recommended frequently that students take when we initially began this. But beyond that, we hadn't even envisaged a system for assessing learning.

**RB:** Now why was that? Why didn't you nail that down ahead of time?

**WD:** Well, it was like the contract, Rich. We knew that we wanted fundamentally in the contract: objectives, learning activities, evaluations, procedures and so forth, but we hadn't really thought it out. That's why we wanted to go into operation, because you had to have live people there to present the challenge to work out the system. You couldn't have the system detailed on paper because the first guy through the door would blow you out of the water with an off-the-wall case.

**RB:** That's right. So, you had a pragmatic approach.

**WD:** Yes, to say the least.

**RB:** That makes a lot of sense. What would you say the atmosphere was in the college that first year in 1971?

**WD:** Well, I think it was really very exciting. I spent 38 years in higher education and it was something very few people ever have an opportunity to do in a career. I think we all recognized that at the time. There was an excitement about it. There was kind of a missionary element to it in terms of trying to convince our more traditional colleagues that we just didn't come in from an outer planet. It was chaotic and sometimes frustrating because we were trying to make do as went along—to develop very important procedures and refine them. It is always easier to start something with a rigid structure and then relax the rules. It's much more difficult to start something that's relaxed and then try to impose rules. So some of the faculty as more requirements were imposed for assessment and contracts got very upset. Teaching they said was an art and it should not be hindered by any kind of rules or regulations. They, the faculty, would define learning. So you had tensions between those who would establish some kind of standards and those who felt that anything was fair game, including liberal arts credit for building book shelves.

**RB:** What would you say about the perception of ESC around SUNY? Any sense of how you were being perceived?

**WD:** Well, on some campuses we were pretty much a joke and not to be taken seriously. The higher echelon in central administration gave us a good deal of support because this is what the Chancellor wanted. Basically, our colleagues across the university were skeptical.

**RB:** Was part of the plan articulating the college with the rest of SUNY; e.g., utilizing SUNY resources—libraries, other resources?

**WD:** Yes, that was in the plan, but we got precious little cooperation from other campuses. There were all sorts of reasons why an Empire State student could not enroll in a daytime class, for instance.

**RB:** What about getting them into libraries?

**WD:** Well, that was another hassle. The campuses wanted compensation for our students using their libraries. There was even talk about activity fees—all sorts of things that were against the notion of the university being open to all students. We believed we had to compensate them for tuition when students cross-registered but that did not mean that our students should have to pay the activity fees at Binghamton, for example. The other place we ran into difficulty very early on was with the Veterans Administration. Students had to take 12 hours to be full-time for compensation. I had to negotiate with them as to what a contract was and how much credit a month was worth. At that time, I was still handling the business end of the college as well as the Albany Center. We also had difficulty with some campuses in transferring credit, particularly if a student enrolled with us for six months to a year and then wanted to go and finish their degree, say, at one of the traditional campuses. Anyway, all of those things finally got worked out, but we had to deal with a lot of department chairpersons, librarians, deans, and academic vice presidents, who, in many cases, were kind of cool to us.

**RB:** Bill, is there anything else about this first year that you'd like to mention?

**WD:** No, not really. As you know, we did negotiate the facilities. We got them remodeled to some degree. We moved in and those were the kinds of major problems we had to solve—finding facilities for the various initial learning centers, Albany, Rochester, places like that.

**RB:** Now, what was behind this geographical spread throughout the state? Why not just stay in Albany?

**WD:** Well, what you didn't want to turn into was a correspondence program. So, the idea was that it would be a college without a campus that could serve people all over the State. Because we had full-time faculty, which was one of the selling points to differentiate us from a correspondence program, we had to put the faculty members all over the state. So we decided to put them along the main population chain, that is along the Thruway: Albany, Syracuse, New Paltz, Suffern, Buffalo, New York City. If we put them in population centers, our chances for failure were greatly reduced. Frankly, I was against that to some degree, and that's what prompted the rural learning sites, or the Center for Statewide Programs—the units. The idea was to put the faculty in communities where there were resources, where there were numbers of potential students.

**RB:** What went into determining the size of the faculty in a given learning center? For example, why not have 50 faculty, or 100, or 10, or 20?

**WD:** Well, there were a number of things. First, one of the things we didn't want to do was create departments, because when you create departments you start departmental requirements and you're right back in to a credit distribution system. Second, we didn't know what the optimum size for a learning center should be, whether it was 300, or 500, or a 1,000 students. Third, we didn't know how many students a mentor could reasonably handle. We initially thought it would be about 50 students. As a matter of fact, that's where we started out. And then we quickly dropped that to about 35 students and then 30 students, and then as centers grew, we hired more and more faculty and the ratio gradually dropped to about 22 to 23 students. Again, this was all kind of hit and miss. We had to get faculty working with students before we could find out how many they could handle. We didn't want a center to grow to a point where it needed a campus. We didn't want to have to build buildings, so we stuck with rented facilities.

**RB:** How did you envision a mentor's workday?

**WD:** Primarily meeting with students, calling students, planning with students. It was very labor intensive type of learning and teaching.

**RB:** Did you see tutoring as an important part of the mentor role?

**WD:** Oh, absolutely, yes. I wouldn't say tutoring and teaching as much as evaluating and guiding learning. In other words, conferring with students, but trying to assess where they were, what their problems were in terms of the contract, and what they needed to move them forward, if they were at a sticking point, and generally evaluating what kind of progress they were making.

**RB:** Do you mean the facilitative role of mentoring---identifying learning resources, material, and personnel?

**WD:** I saw that has the primary mentor role.

**RB:** Facilitative?

**WD:** Yes.

**RB:** Was providing instruction in her own discipline seen as a minor role?

**WD:** That would be a tutoring function, but you could hire other people to do that. It could lead to a mouth-in-the-ear approach, you know, a one-on-one lecture. That was not what we had in mind.

**RB:** But you did see facilitation as the primary role?

**WD:** Yes, and faculty as a role model for the learner—how to identify, organize, and utilize learning resources.

**RB:** How did you decide on what kind of faculty you needed? Do we need a PhD in physics, or a PhD in literature, a PhD in business? What kinds of people were you looking for and what kind of mix did you need in these regional centers?

**WD:** Well, in the regional centers we needed a range of academic specialties, not necessarily two in one specialties but a range and the broader the range the better. They could talk with one another and pick one another's brains in planning contracts where they were into things not in their academic area of specialization.

**RB:** How did you see the role of the dean at the learning centers? And why have a dean, why not just a director?

**WD:** Well, first of all, the role of the dean in large part was community relations and relations with other institutions. The title of dean would open more doors than the title of director. If I had to go to SUNY Brockport, and I were dean and wanted to negotiate the use of the library, I would probably get a better reception than if I were the director. In large part that was because the dean was engaged in public relations as well as providing leadership in the center.

**RB:** And how did you see the relationship of the dean to the faculty?

**WD:** Well, we always hoped that the dean would have some students and would be a participating member of the faculty, and have in his or her own background the kind of teaching experience that would relate to faculty and provide leadership for them.

**RB:** Now, by easy transition, I'd like to discuss with you the Center for Statewide Programs. When did that idea come about in terms of the chronology of the college's development? When did you first conceive of the center? What was its purpose?

**WD:** Well, my first thought was that everything, as I mentioned to you, was going to the population centers. For the first time the University with this form of teaching and learning could get into areas where it had not been, the more rural, inaccessible places. Plattsburgh and Watertown and some of the backwater places would not have access to the learning assets of the college. I argued that we ought to try to do more to serve the rural areas and that viewpoint came from primarily my experience in Plattsburgh, knowing that population up there and having spent a good deal of time in the Adirondacks. When I was up there during the summers and other times, people would say, "What is Empire State College? That sounds good. Where can I enroll? Well, they could only enroll in Albany. So, I argued for smaller units located in smaller population centers. After much tugging and pulling, I was authorized to start a learning unit, and the first one was in Plattsburgh.

**RB:** When was that—1972?

**WD:** I believe it was.

**RB:** What kind of critical mass did you think a learning unit needed to be successful?

**WD:** Well, one mentor and clerical support. The mentor would be what we'd originally talked about in planning the College, a facilitator, not a lecturer. I recognized that the person had to have adequate library facilities and have access to the kinds of things, perhaps on a smaller scale, because we were serving a smaller number of students than the people in learning centers. I saw the mentor as a facilitator and a model for learning rather than a lecturer or tutor.

**RB:** Do you recall any particulars about the Plattsburgh unit? What kind of difficulties did you encounter those first few months?

**WD:** Actually, there were remarkably few difficulties. We hired Schef Pierce [subsequently, the founding director of the Center for Distance Learning] who was teaching at Plattsburgh State. He knew the community. I knew Schef because I'd hired him when I was department chair in Missouri. We had known each other for some years. I knew the kind of person he was. To me he was ideal as a unit mentor. So when we opened up in Plattsburgh, I was very comfortable. He had good relations on the campus. He had been active in a number of community groups and he was known in the community. From the standpoint of attracting students and initiating the concept, [there were] absolutely no problems. In fact, it was so smashingly successful that we were quickly authorized to open other units. There was good student response and good response from the college faculty to Schef Pierce. He was accepted. Though the concept was not necessarily accepted, he was. That was important. It just worked.

**RB:** So, he used the SUNY Plattsburgh faculty as tutors.

**WD:** Yes, in large part. And there was a community college he had to draw from.

**RB:** Did you have a formal relationship with SUNY Plattsburgh? Did you negotiate the unit's presence with the president of SUNY Plattsburgh?

**WD:** Yes, I had taught at SUNY Plattsburgh, having been there only about four or five years previously. I had been an administrator there. So, I knew a number of the administrators. I knew the academic vice president for instance. We were good friends, and it was easy to negotiate for a) space, and b) cooperation in terms of the library and other learning resources and things of that nature. There were no problems at all.

**RB:** SUNY Plattsburgh was the first effort by the college to develop a formal relationship with another SUNY campus.

**WD:** Right.

**RB:** Was this in keeping with the mission of the college?

**WD:** Well, that was one of them. We said from the outset that we would have to draw on the cooperation and, in some cases, resources and facilities of our sister institutions. What we really asked for, more than anything, were facilities. In some cases we were charged rent and

in other cases we weren't. In a few cases where we were charged rent [and] we never paid them, so they were donating anyway.

**RB:** What about the next unit? Do you recall how that was established?

**WD:** Let me think.

**RB:** Or, if you can't recall, just generally about the other units with this specific programmatic thrusts.

**WD:** I don't know if we had, basically, a next unit. We did go to Westchester early in the game, and that was the unit at Purchase which later became the Lower Hudson Center. Bernie Parker had that unit.

**RB:** Was that with federal money—New Model's money?

**WD:** No, not really. That came later with Mary Ann Biller. It was a separate operation. She was in Suffern, and we were across the river over in Purchase. She was doing a separate thing for the New Models for Careers program. We also started almost simultaneously the Religion and the City program, the Arts and the City program, and the Communications and the City program, and the Human Services and the City program. In other words, we started an urban study center that is now, in part, with the Metropolitan Center in New York.

**RB:** Now why was that? Why did you establish those specialized programs?

**WD:** Let me back up and finish some other thoughts on establishing units. We also set up, with George Bragle, the Mohawk Unit in Utica/Rome and the Binghamton Unit with Forest Davis. But to get back to your question on the individualized units, we were doing a lot of things that the centers did not want to do. We were accepting some faculty members that the centers didn't want and made them unit coordinators. These people came from other centers where they were unhappy for one reason or another or the center was not happy with them, and we acquired them. Forest, for instance, was associate dean at Long Island. Ron Corwin didn't want him as associate dean. I was asked if we could take him into the Statewide center. At that time, we were talking about setting up a Binghamton unit and Forest decided that he wanted to get out of Long Island and go to Binghamton, where he did an excellent job. Forest is one example of faculty transplanted within the college.

**RB:** Was there a particular reason why Religion and the City unit would not have been established and operated by the Metropolitan Center?

**WD:** Well, that center was having some problems at that time. The faculty was having problems and at that time it just seemed simpler not to approach them on any kind of program—just work around them. We'd decided that there were very rich resources in the arts, communications, and religion in New York City, and we really ought to take advantage of those. But there were such an internal melee going on in the center, we just decided to set up a parallel structure.

**RB:** Who came up with the idea of these special units in New York?

**WD:** Well, I'm not sure. I don't know whether it was Jim Hall or Loren Baritz at the time, or a combination of the two. I'm not certain really where the idea came from. I will say it wasn't my idea. But I was asked if I thought we could pull it off, and I thought we could. So we did it.

**RB:** What year was that?

**WD:** That had to be about '72, too.

**RB:** And these programs were all started at the same time?

**WD:** Yes, very hard on the heels of one another.

**RB:** What kind of funding did you have for them?

**WD:** Well, one of the problems was that they were not economical. We needed a secretary, telephone, and office furniture. We needed enrollment to sustain that kind of expenditure. So, the way we compensated for that was to carry more FTEs. It was carrying about 30 or 35 FTEs, for the most part, per faculty member, while the other centers were down to about 25 to 26 FTEs. But that was the quid pro quo for the kind of independence and freedom that the various faculty members in the units had.

**RB:** Now, I remember reading in an *ESC News* article about the establishment of the Center for Statewide Programs that one of the purposes was to use the learning modules being developed by Empire State College and SUNY Independent Study course materials. How did that work out in reality? Did the units make much use of those modules and the independent study courses?

**WD:** Not really.

**RB:** Why was that?

**WD:** Well, first of all, many of them weren't worth much, frankly. Secondly, faculty members really don't want to be told that they should use these materials because it was developed by some academic star who they did not know. Faculty members generally, then and today, really don't want to be told what kind of instructional materials they have to use. So it was a combination of the two factors. There were very few good modules, if there were any; and secondly, there was just a natural resistance to the use of these modules, both in the centers and at the units. They weren't very practical.

**RB:** So you really didn't feel obligated to push their use on the units.

**WD:** No, no, not really. I had enough faith in the people in the units that if they didn't want to use them, I knew that they'd find more than adequate substitutes for the students.

**RB:** As the dean for the Center for Statewide Programs what kind of challenges did you have to meet that other deans didn't have in regional learning centers?

**WD:** For one thing, I think initially just negotiating arrangements with the various campuses for office space. Secondly, to try to develop a faculty that had some feeling of cohesiveness, where they felt they could support and would support one another. They did eventually, not only in meetings we had but through the telephone in terms of counseling with one another and seeking advice regarding resources and academic planning. Thirdly, to make certain that they were really serving the students they were assigned. They had to work independently to get their job done. Some never even had a colleague to prick their consciences, if they goofed off in terms of students. So, it was a matter of making certain that you have the right kind of people who really were committed to students, and I think we were fortunate in that regard. This sense of cohesiveness was important because there weren't many faculty in the center initially. We were like Empire State College in the University [system of campuses]. The units were looked upon as something less legitimate by the center faculties. There was some sentiment in various quarters that the Statewide Center thing shouldn't exist.

**RB:** Do you think because you set up units within striking distance of the regional learning centers that this made some of the deans nervous?

**WD:** No, not really. In fact, Rochester at one point had what they called a Syracuse satellite. While they were criticizing us, they were trying to preempt our growth by setting up their own satellites. They called them satellites, we called them learning units. And Rochester had set up a Syracuse satellite which didn't work out very well. Albany had set up a satellite in New Paltz. There were other so-called satellites. The Rochester center, for example, would send out a faculty member to sit in Syracuse for a few days a week and try to deal with students. But they didn't succeed because these people in these various satellites were not well supported by the people back at the center. If you volunteered for this, you were diluting the purity of the concept of the centers. So, we took over Syracuse, Ithaca, and New Paltz satellites. We were doing the kinds of things nobody else particularly wanted to do.

**RB:** So, the deans didn't very much mind if you were in their catchment area but you did indicate that there was concern.

**WD:** Well, I think, some of them didn't like it, but as I say, they didn't have faculty members who would leave the reservation to serve students. To them it was a little like doing extension and they didn't want to do that. Yes, we moved into areas that could have been fertile ground for center enrollments, but we did it because other people didn't want to do it.

**RB:** Bill, how would characterize your relationship with central administration in Saratoga as far as getting the kind of support you needed for the program?

**WD:** We had smashing enrollments [FTE]. There were times that we were carrying enrollments to offset FTE deficits at other centers. From that standpoint, I think the center was appreciated. From other standpoints, I don't think that in some quarters there was a lot of enthusiasm for what we were doing in the administration. From my own personal point of view, professionally speaking, I was happy to be in Saratoga because I enjoyed the area, but I could also monitor what was going on at 2 Union Avenue [administrative offices], which helped me in keeping the

center faculty informed of developments and enabled them to anticipate certain things. And it also gave me an opportunity to, frankly, bitch at things before they were implemented. And I did, I think, a considerable amount of that.

**RB:** Can you think of any examples, off hand?

**WD:** Well, there were so many kinds of little things. There were some appointments, for instance, that were proposed internally, promoting people from within that I complained about. But it did not have a lot of effect. And there were some policies and some procedures that, I can't be specific at this point, that I think were forestalled because the [Statewide] center faculty, which came to Saratoga more than any other group of faculty, was able to react negatively in some instances and influence the outcome of that whatever it was.

**RB:** Bill, in considering the [higher] productivity of mentors in the learning units compared to the productivity of mentors in the regional learning cents, how do you explain the sometimes dramatic difference in the FTEs?

**WD:** Well, I think a) they [unit mentors] had fewer distractions and b) I think they really enjoyed the relative freedom they had. There was perhaps some unstated kind of competition among some of the units. I think in many cases, Rich, it was a matter of their wanting to teach more students than they had to in some cases because they didn't want to disappoint the students. Now, if you had 30 people show for an orientation, there were mentors within the units who'd say, "Gee, I really don't want to turn any of them away." And they would enroll them.

**RB:** When you say in general, were the Statewide units established at SUNY campuses more successful than units that were not?

**WD:** No, I'm not sure that that's true.

**RB:** For example, SUNY Plattsburgh versus Arts and the City.

**WD:** No, because the City [New York] had so many resources that I think, in fact, those units may have had, in many instances, more of an advantage in terms of what students could access to learn. Now, if you wanted to think about Watertown, for instance, Peg Spanos was there. She was really isolated and working on a community college campus initially. She moved off the campus eventually, but that had to be very difficult in terms of resources. However, she did an excellent job. I would say where she was located was probably more difficult. But for the most part people had pretty good resources available to them.

**RB:** I wanted to ask you about Extended Programs [established in the fall of 1975 and progenitor of the Center for Distance Learning]. How did it turn out that Statewide was asked to serve as the host center for this new program? Did the idea come from you?

**WD:** No, it came from Jim. And that was because, Rich, I had had the experience with the University of the Air and with the SUNY Independent Study Program. That's basically why I had this thrust upon me at the time.

**RB:** Did you have a clear notion of what Jim wanted to accomplish?

**WD:** Yes, I did, but I did not have a lot of faith that it would ever develop simply because it was too damned expensive to do. Unless you resorted to correspondence study, which was fairly inexpensive but then you went back to drop-out rate again. At that time, we were talking about interactive video, and computers were just coming on line and all sorts of things that were being developed, none of which was inexpensive either for the student or the institution. I wasn't really certain that over the long haul it was going to take off because the problem isn't the technology in these things, the problem is the software. Everybody has a computer but the big expense is development of the materials to use for instruction. That problem has never been solved very well, for the most part, on a scale broad enough and complex enough for college students working toward a degree program.

**RB:** Are you saying that you thought that technology would be a major thrust in Extended Programs?

**WD:** Yes.

**RB:** And print materials?

**WD:** Not print materials. Print materials were the least expensive. If you were going to do this right, talking seriously about what Jim Hall had in mind at that time in 1975—interactive video and computers—I knew, having had the experience of the University of the Air, what it would cost to develop software for the machines. If you weren't going to use high-tech machines, then you already had the correspondence programs all over the country that could be used. In other words, you had to go one way or the other. If you were not going to use the available new instructional technologies, the thing that was most readily available and the least expensive to the institution and the student was print material. If you were going to go high tech, the cost of the development of those things would be prohibitive and the cost of acquisition of the software for the students, even if you didn't develop it yourself, would be prohibitive. I don't know if that makes sense to you.

**RB:** Yes, it does. Now why do you think Jim—this was back in 1975 when Extended Programs got started in the fall—decided to pursue this structured learning thrust? Did he see something deficient in the academic program of the college-- some direction that we didn't take that we needed to take? Was part of the mission not being fulfilled?

**WD:** I think that the whole idea of contract learning in an unstructured setting made Jim a bit nervous. That's a personal opinion. I may be entirely wet on that. This was one way to bring the course outline and structure back into the scheme of things.

**RB:** So, perhaps the focus on individualized contract learning in the initial planning stages of the college might have reflected the presence of Chickering.

**WD:** Oh, definitely did. Yes.

**RB:** The force of his personality?

**WD:** Yes, absolutely. But it also reflected and resonated well with what Boyer had in mind. After all, Boyer was the one who invited Chickering to participate in the early part of the planning stages. He had read some of Chickering's work and knew him by reputation [and personally through Boyer's Goddard connections]. Jim came out of a traditional setting. Before he was on the planning committee, he hadn't really thought about the adult student. He had nothing to do with continuing education or adult learning or anything else related to what Empire State College turned out to be. He was Boyer's assistant when the planning started. Jim was involved with the cultural programs for the University. Then just after Boyer was made chancellor, we were pretty much in the planning of this thing. Jim was still in Boyer's old office, not in the chancellor's office.

**RB:** Now, when Extended Programs was launched, there was a provision for two full-time faculty. There was an AI budget and the program got the use of Judy Wilson for clerical support. Why was so little invested in launching a program that, in the President's mind, was pretty important?

**WD:** Well, for one thing, there wasn't a lot of money laying around and secondly to do what he wanted done required a lot of money. And I think Jim was getting some pressure for this from someplace, but initially it turned out to be was kind of a token program. Token in support and in every respect, and it just kind of sat on a shelf. It was something that he really wanted to be visible as an arm of the College, but he didn't have the resources to make it functional.

**RB:** And there were some thrusts that were made by Extended Programs. For example, the state-wide use of telecourses coordinated with the public television stations that enrolled hundreds of students, which I coordinated, and the use of British Open University materials, and the initiatives with state agencies [NYS development centers, correctional facilities, etc.]

**WD:** All of that.

**RB:** Generic contracts?

**WD:** Yes.

**RB:** So, the program was demonstrating that structured learning, which included various approaches, might succeed on a statewide basis, even nationally. I mentored students residing in Texas, Minnesota, California, Japan, and elsewhere. So, at least with that minimal amount of resources there was enough evidence to suggest that a larger investment would reap even greater rewards.

**WD:** Yes, but you know, eventually you'd have to have a fairly complex infrastructure to handle the logistics of all of this.

**RB:** That's right, a center unto itself.

**WD:** Yes, right--as a matter of fact a separate college.

**RB:** Extended Programs is now the Center for Distance Learning.

**WD:** But you couldn't do it on a shoe string.

**RB:** Right. Soon after Extended Programs was established, the Independent Study Program [which had been transferred to ESC from SUNY central] became Bob Hassenger's operation, and was set up right across the drive at the carriage house [of our main building at 28 Union Avenue]. The two programs were close in proximity and philosophy. Why weren't the two programs linked up right away? Eventually, in March of '78 they merged to form the Center for Independent Study, [and later the Center for Distance Learning in '79] but prior to that they worked in isolation. Did that make sense to you?

**WD:** No, it did not. But a lot of it was internal politics. A lot of what was done was a result of internal politics, Rich, frankly. And a lot of it was the fact that faculty had made a pass at independent study materials before they rejected them. They went into learning contracts, and yet we had this whole library of material that was sitting there on the shelf. I suppose there was somebody around the place, if not Jim Hall, who decided that we really ought do something with it. We made this big investment in it, you know. But, as I say, there were people who didn't feel like using other people's materials. And the personalities involved, the two entities you're talking about, had been around the College and, in some instances, these things developed as a result of a kind of make-work policy. Well, it's true. . . .

**RB:** So, for political reasons, then, the Independent Study Program, was kept under Jacobson's wing in the Office of Academic Development?

**WD:** Yes, I think so.

**RB:** Rather than being merged with Extended Programs right way, initially. Then two years later, in March of '78, the two programs were fused.

**WD:** Yes, it took a lot of persuading over the intervening years, Rich, for me to get enthusiastic about anything that had to do with extended learning. What's the use of putting your time and energy into something that was not going to be supported financially? I just was not personally enthusiastic of the whole thing. I thought it was window dressing. We could say we had this program going, never mind we weren't supporting it, and the enrollments were practically zilch.

**RB:** So you were arguing for more resources?

**WD:** Yes. If you're going to do it, do it right.

**RB:** And you succeeded?

**WD:** No, no way! Not before I left. Remember, I left in the spring of '79.

**RB:** When you left, the administration decided to pump resources into the Center for Distance Learning in faculty lines, clerical lines, etc.

**WD:** Well, it may be that they didn't do it because they didn't think I was going to use the resources right. Or, it may be that they thought it would develop more rapidly with a new dean.

**RB:** You were a very successful dean, probably the most successful in the College, so I don't think that was part of the reasoning.

**WD:** Well, a lot of things happened, apparently, after I left. The student/faculty ratio was dropped for the units, and there were a lot of changes that didn't happen while I was there. They occurred shortly after I left. I think there's probably a reason for some of that.

**RB:** Bill, in looking at the history of the Center for Statewide Programs, were there any major directions that the program took that you had not anticipated initially?

**WD:** Well, I didn't think we'd wind up with as many units as we eventually did, for one thing. Secondly, I didn't think we'd be handling the number of students we did, obviously. And thirdly, I didn't think we would have a faculty that eventually evolved into such an effective, close-knit group.

**RB:** One would think that a faculty in dispersion would not be a cohesive faculty. It seems contradictory, but in effect just the opposite occurred.

**WD:** And I think there was more mutual faculty support within the center than existed in the regional learning centers. I think there was probably a lot of less infighting and more *esprit de corps* than the other centers. Those kinds of things surprised me because they saw each other so infrequently, a couple of days a month.

**RB:** How did the faculty perceive Extended Programs?

**WD:** I really don't know. I have no idea frankly. I don't think they were against it at all. I don't think they had a lot of faith, and maybe this was because of some of my influence, that it wasn't going to fly because there just didn't seem to be the money to get it off the ground. I think that it was a matter of their saying, as they did with everything, let's give it a try and see where it goes. I think they were supportive—they were always supportive almost without exception. But I just don't think that they had faith that the resources were there to accomplish the mission.

**RB:** Well, Bill, I can't think of anything else that I might have asked. Do you have anything else that you feel I might have missed?

**WD:** No, Richard, not at all.

**End of Transcript**